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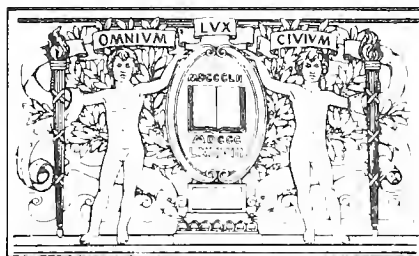


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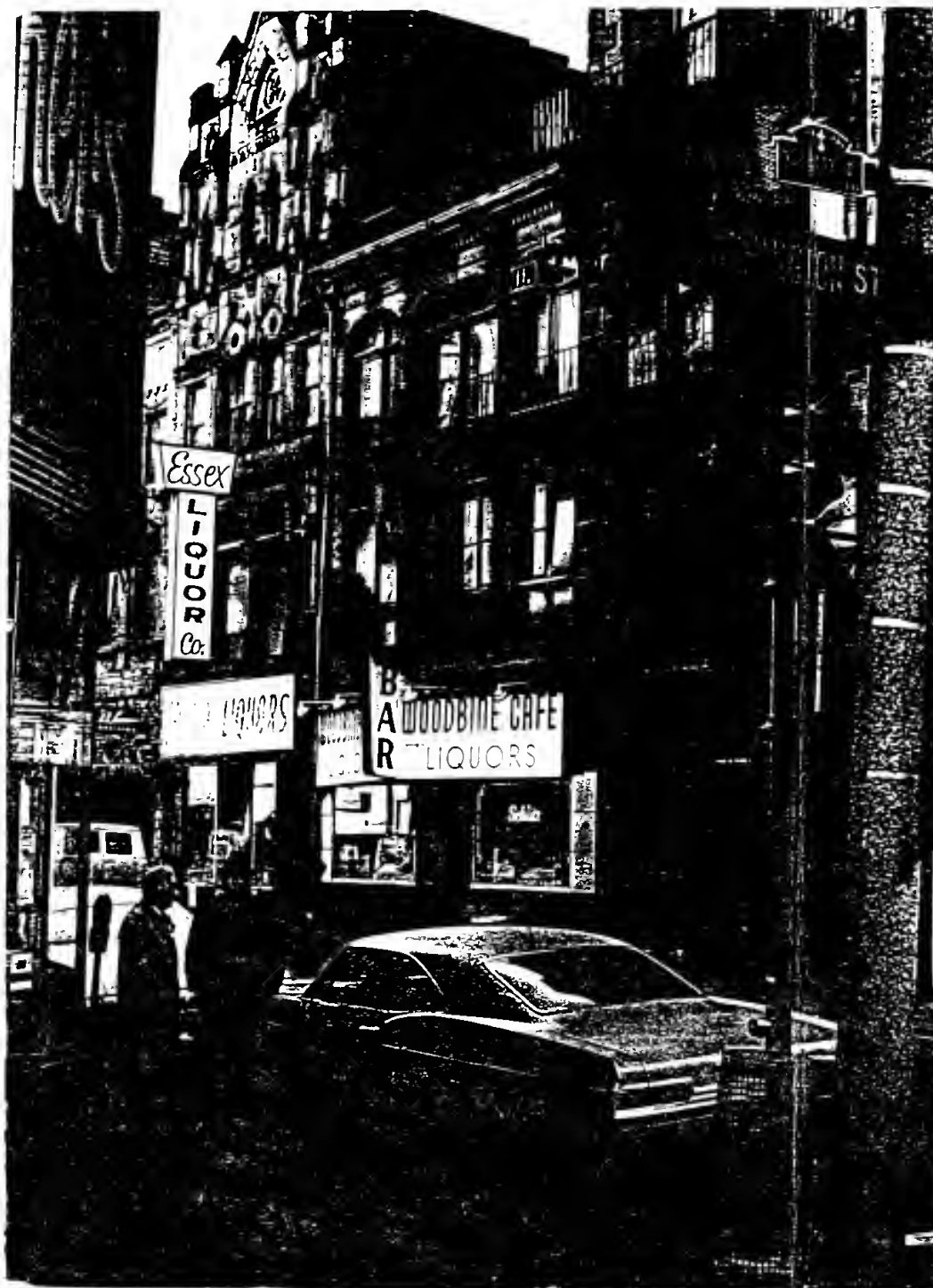




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# 11,13 ESSEX STREET

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

DOCUMENTED DECEMBER, 1972

RALPH JACKSON

BOB LUCHETTI

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11 - 13 ESSEX STREET BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS  
( 1871 - )

### BUILDING DESCRIPTION

#### MATERIALS OF CONSTRUCTION:MILL TYPE

1. Walls:Brick parti and rear walls 20" thick
2. Street facade:wood, glass, wood cornice and trim
3. Foundation:granite block
4. Floors:heavy timber 4" X 14" Douglas Fir spanning the distance between parti walls (27') at 16" centers. Overlaid with 1" sub flooring and 3/4" Douglas Fir flooring
5. Roof:similar framing:tar and gravel, pitched 1/12 to rear
6. Interior finishes:lath and plaster throughout except for embossed tin ceiling and a 42" wood (Douglas Fir and Pine) wainscott in the basement and on the first floor level - first floor restaurant has since been overlaid with suspended acoustic ceiling (1959)

EXTERIOR DIMENSION:65' X 27', 40' high at street 99

#### NUMBER OF BAYS:

1. Structural - one
2. Window bays on street facade - three
3. Window bays on original rear elevation - four

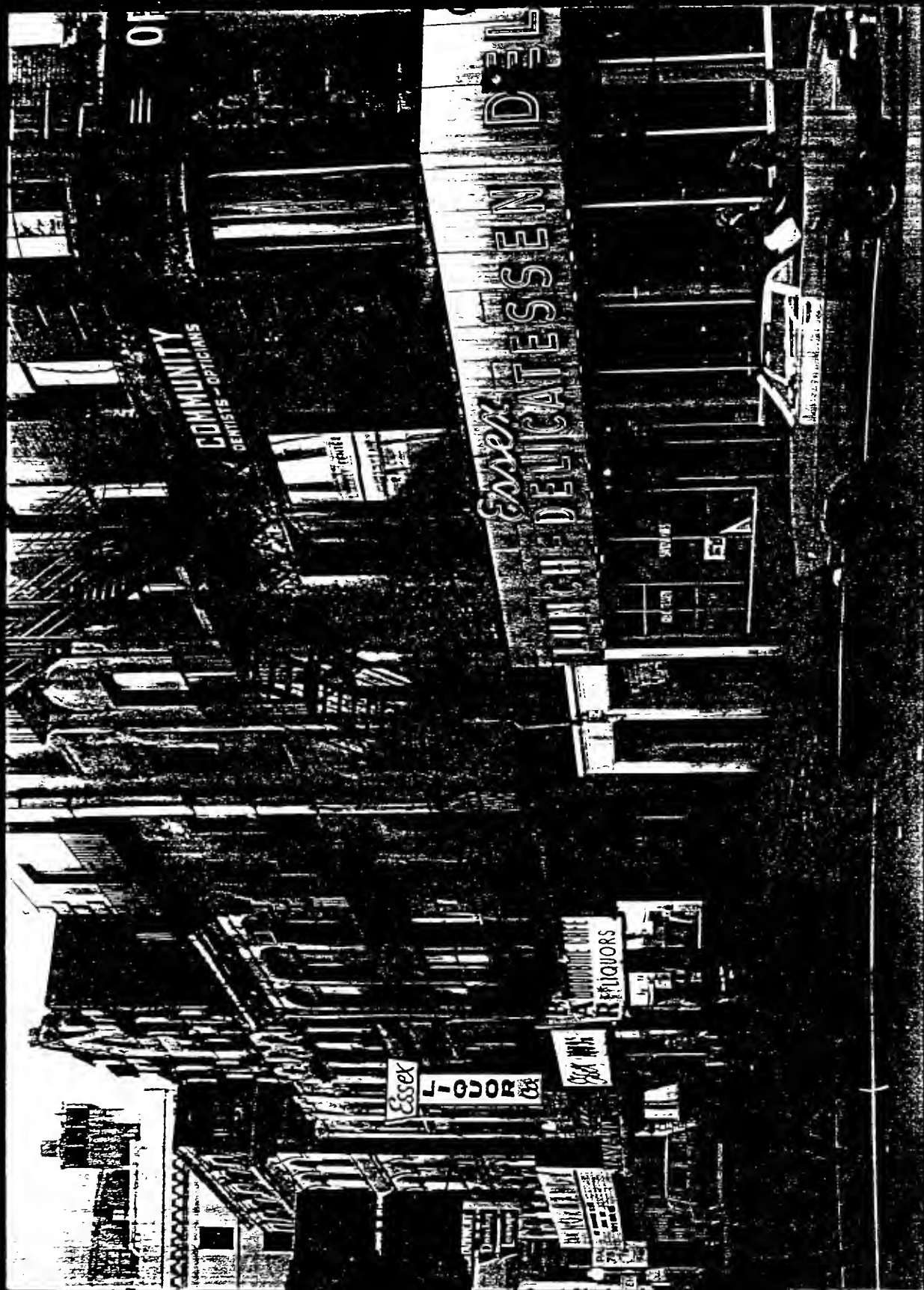
#### NOTABLE EXTERIOR FEATURES:

1. Street facade:a wood construction typical of many of the commercial buildings built in Boston. Three window bays with ornamented cornice (fascia, modillions, dentils, cyma reversa, and astragals)

2. Skylight on roof and over kitchen

STYLE CATEGORY:typical commercial building many of









which were built in Boston in the early 1870's as a result of fires and a rapidly expanding commercial economy. This particular facade (Plates 1, 2, 4, 6, 7; Drawings 2, 3) resembles very closely a cast iron construction, a technique which was very common especially in the early 1870's. Plates 6 and 7 are a comparison of the Essex facade and a cast iron facade in St. Louis of a similar date. Hence the Essex facade is in effect a wooden copy of a cast iron copy. At that time, wood proved to be a solution which was cheaper than iron. Similar but more ornate facades were built throughout Boston at this time. (Plates 12, 13)

## HISTORY

DATE OF CONSTRUCTION: 1871

### OWNERSHIP OF PROPERTY

A title search at the Suffolk County Registry of Deeds revealed that the property at 11 - 13 Essex Street was bought by David Sears from Mary Ann Hastings on May 16, 1860 (Book 778/141) The purchase of this parcel gave Sears ownership of the buildings and lands on the entire southeast corner of the Washington-Essex intersection up to and including the 11 - 13 property and excluding that at 15 - 17 Essex Street. The David Sears real estate trust was established on July 29, 1889. The property was sold on December 1, 1960 to the Fitzgerald Investment Trust.

### EVIDENCE OF A BUILDING ON THE PROPERTY

The deed from Mary Ann Hastings reads in part, "...parcel of land and buildings thereon..." with no other mention of structure. The Book of Boston of 1871 records a move of Watermans Co. (owned by Nathaniel Waterman, tin-smith), a kitchen supply store, to 11 - 13 Essex from 5 - 7 Essex in that year. The Book of Boston of 1868 records Waterman's move from Quincy to 5 - 7 Essex Street. The

Great Boston Fire of November 1872 did no damage on Essex Street near Washington Street. A fire in May 1873 damaged a great deal of Essex near Washington but did no damage at 11 - 13. Evidence of this was found in an advertisement for Waterman's in the Boston Evening Transcript of May 30, 1873 which stated that the building was "All right" and describing their condition as safe. (Plate 11) An insurance report of 1877 describes the use of the building as mercantile on the first two floors and residential on the third floor.<sup>1</sup> Hence, 1871, the year that Waterman's moved into 11 - 13 Essex, is assumed to be the year of construction.

#### ADJACENT BUILDINGS

15 - 17 Essex - Gothic revival structure to the east (Plate 3) built 1873 (date found in a documentation of the building dated 1968 in the office of the Director of the Carpenter Center for Visual Arts, Harvard University).

5-7 Essex- 630 Washington-Liberty Tree Building (Plate 3,10) Built in 1849 by David Sears, west of 11-13 (Information from Bostonian Society Librarian, Boston)

#### ARCHITECTS AND BUILDERS

Anonymous. Built by David Sears Real Estate Trust affiliated with 50 Associates, a Boston based real estate development firm with considerable holdings in the Boston area

#### HISTORY OF OCCUPANTS AND OPERATIONS

1871-1905: Waterman's Kitchen Supply  
(Information from the Book of Boston 1871-1905)

1905: Massachusetts Transit Authority builds a subway entrance at 5-7 Essex street adjacent to 11-13. Restaurants appear at the corner of Washington and Essex streets. The first floor of 11-13 becomes a restaurant. A restaurant has occupied the premises under various names

1905  
restaurants  
MTA

since 1905. (King's Restaurant, 1919, New Premier Cafeteria, 1935, Essex Food Shop 1942, Woodbine Cafe 1972).

The third floor has been an office storage space since 1905. There is no evidence of a residence other than the above mentioned insurance report. The second floor has been abandoned for some time. Previously, the space served a mercantile function with firms such as Schultz Cigar Company occupying the premises. Presently, the upper two floors are designated by the county assessor as loft spaces.

#### HISTORY OF ALTERATIONS AND REMODELING

The major alterations to the building have consisted of the addition of a kitchen and dumbwaiter (Drawing 7) in approximately 1905 and the alteration, one of the entire facade and two of the first floor facade.

The kitchen was most likely added in 1905 when the MTA built the subway entrance next door and Waterman's left making way for a restaurant. Physical evidence of an addition is found in the masonry connection of the kitchen to the original structure and the brick infill on the second floor of four window openings. The granite lintels are still in place surrounded by brick.

A photo of the building at 15 - 17 Essex Street of 1890 shows one corner of the 11 - 13 building, depicting a facade slightly different than the present one. (Plates 8,9) The full facade in both states is reconstructed in Drawings 2 and 3. No date is available for this alteration

although 1905 is likely. The street level facade has been remodeled twice according to records of permits issued for construction at Boston City Hall. Drawing 2 depicts this alteration. The present facade (Plates 1,2) was added in 1946 when porcelain enameled steel was used to cover the glass facade of 1935.

#### CIRCULATION AND ACCESS

*Access  
method*

The present condition of the building in no way indicates how access to the second and third levels was achieved from the street level. At present the third floor (Drawings 6,7) is reached through the third floor of the Liberty Tree Building. This floor is occupied by offices and is also used as a storage space for the Essex Delicatessen which is located in the Liberty Tree Building. The second floor (Drawings 6,7) was most likely always reached via a stairway in the eastern corner of the Liberty Tree Building which was also owned by David Sears. The doorway to this building is presently boarded up. A lithograph (Reproduced, Plate 10) from The Book of Boston depicting the Liberty Tree Building in 1851 shows this access but not the 11 - 13 building. The Liberty Tree Building when built housed a large, rather lavish hall known as the Union Hall, a lithograph of which appears in Gleason's Pictorial of 1852. This stairway originally served this room. The hall was removed around 1870 and the staircase was subsequently used for the then new 11 - 13 building. The third floor may also have been

reached from this stairway.

#### SITE AND URBANISTIC PLACEMENT

The neighborhood at the intersection of Washington and Essex Streets was as it is today a heavily commercialized district near the heart of downtown. This particular area was the entertainment district of Boston with a concentration of theaters and meeting halls. As described above, the Liberty Tree Building adjacent to 11 - 13 Essex contained the large, lavish Union Hall. The area was, as all downtown urban districts of the time, full of hotels, union halls, fraternity temples, a museum, and the public library. The district is presently extremely deteriorated and awaiting redevelopment under the "Park Plaza" project. The theaters and hotels have given over their live performances and comfortable rooms to pornographic movies and degenerate transients.

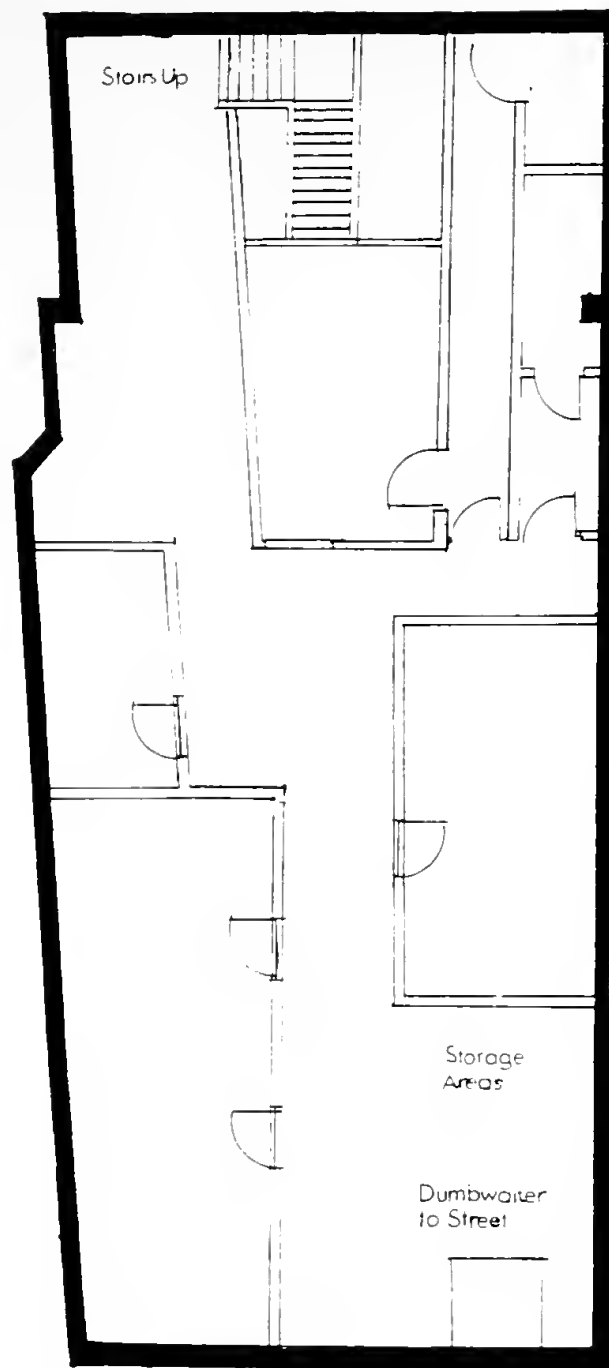
The site is one of historical importance. The Liberty Tree Building stands on the site that was the stand of Liberty Tree, a giant elm under which the Revolutionary Sons of Liberty organized in 1765 and where they continued to meet until 1775 when the British cut down the tree. The site is now marked by the Liberty Tree Plaque, a wood carving of about 1865 which is attached to the wall of 630 Washington Street.<sup>2</sup>

The building's present function, as a bar, is one which

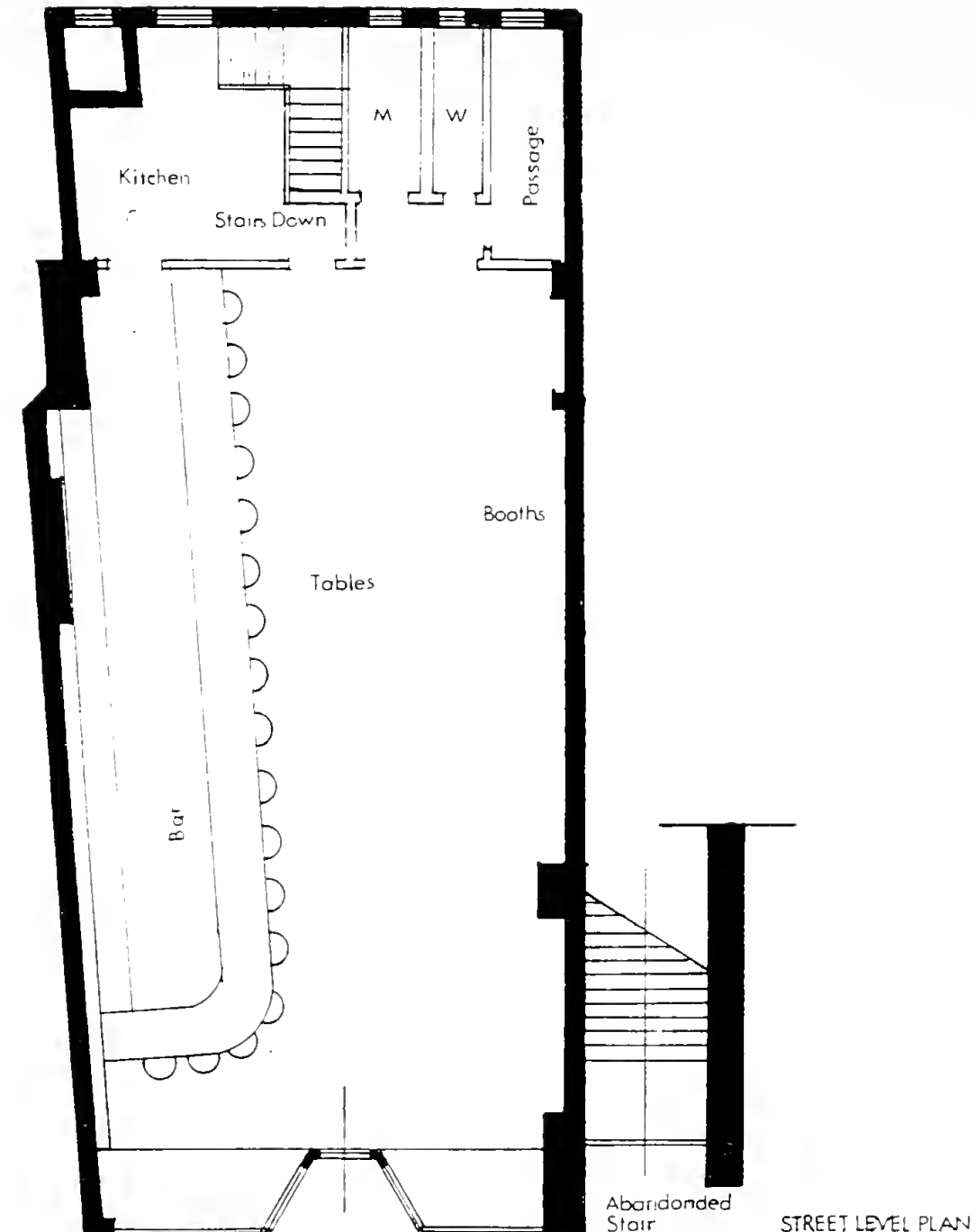
has also been predominant in the history of the area. Justice Morgan was a pub at Washington and Essex Streets in 1686 and was known as a meeting place for respectable Boston gentlemen.<sup>3</sup> Bars and restaurants have been an important service of the area and today predominate.

#### THE DESIGN PROBLEM AND SOLUTION

The plans of the building readily reveal that the building was fit<sup>ted</sup> between two existing structures and is dependent on them for structural support and access. As a design the only aspect of significance is the facade and its comparability to cast iron buildings and other faces in Boston. The building is unremarkable but is a good example of a typical commercial structure of the 1870's as well as one of the only still standing in Boston with a wooden facade.



BASEMENT PLAN



# 11,13 ESSEX STREET

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

FLOOR PLANS: 1972

SCALE 0 4 8 16



December 1972

Prepared by:

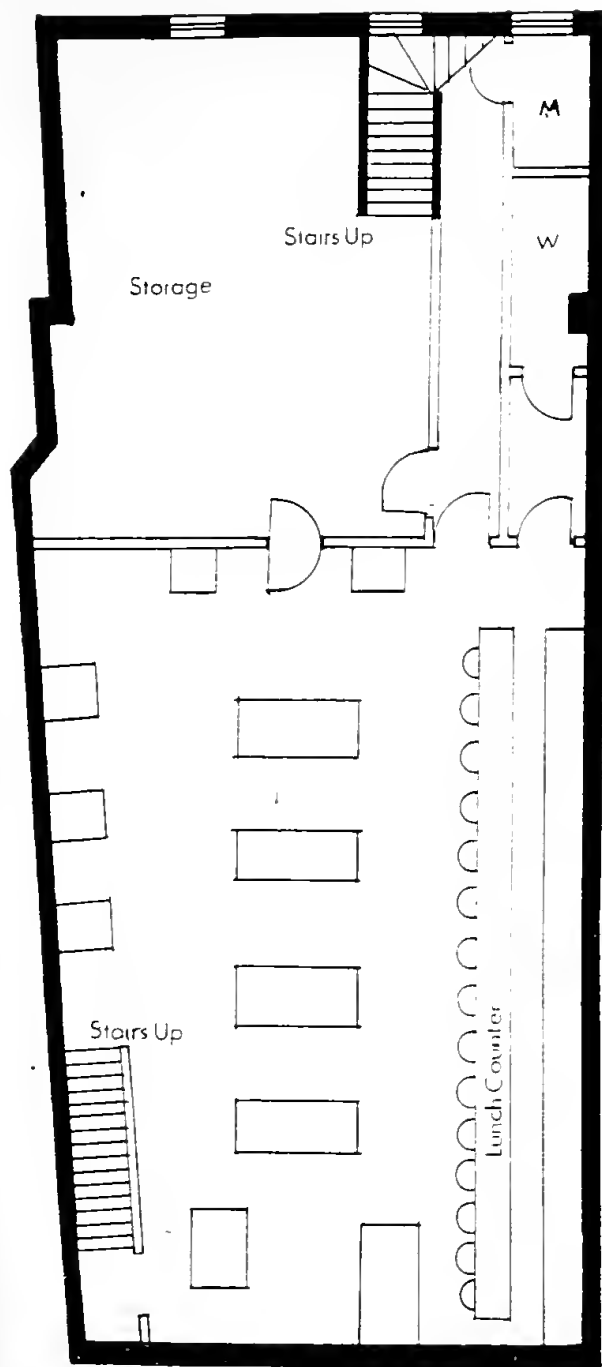
Ralph Jackson  
Robert Luchetti  
James R. Owen

for Visual and Environmental  
Studies 163 Professor Sekler

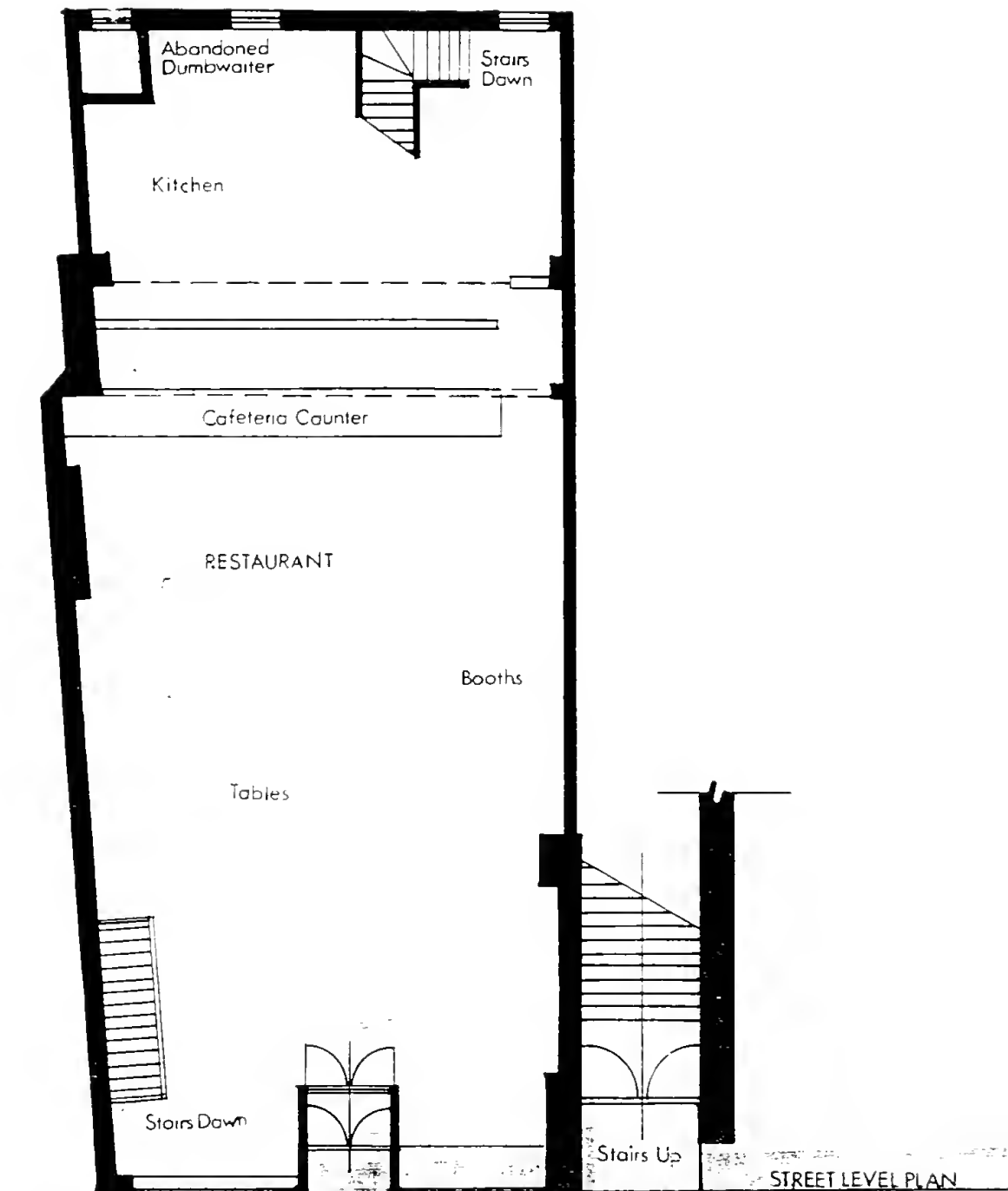
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BASEMENT PLAN



STREET LEVEL PLAN

11,13 ESSEX STREET  
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

FLOOR PLANS: 1935

SCALE 0 4 8 16

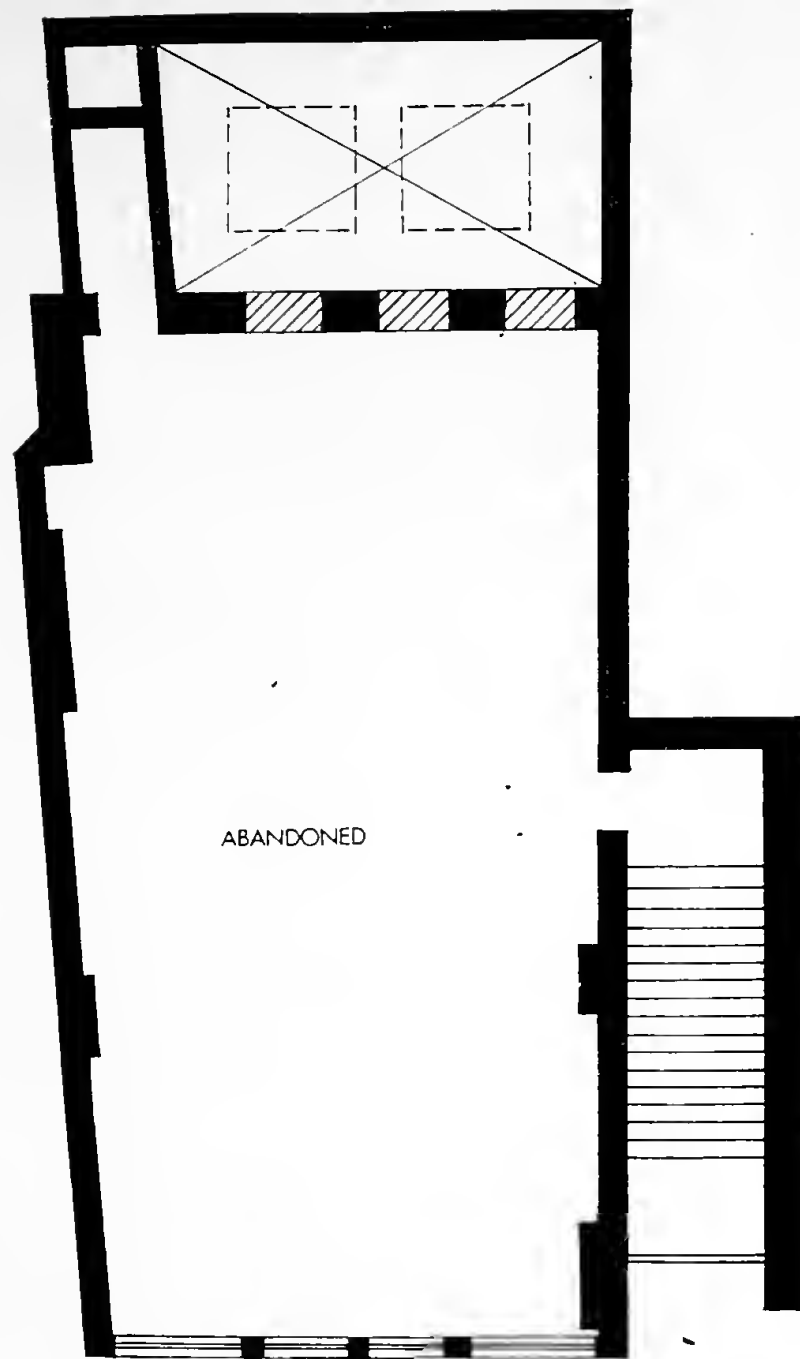


Prepared by  
Ralph Jackson  
Robert Luchetti  
James R. Owen

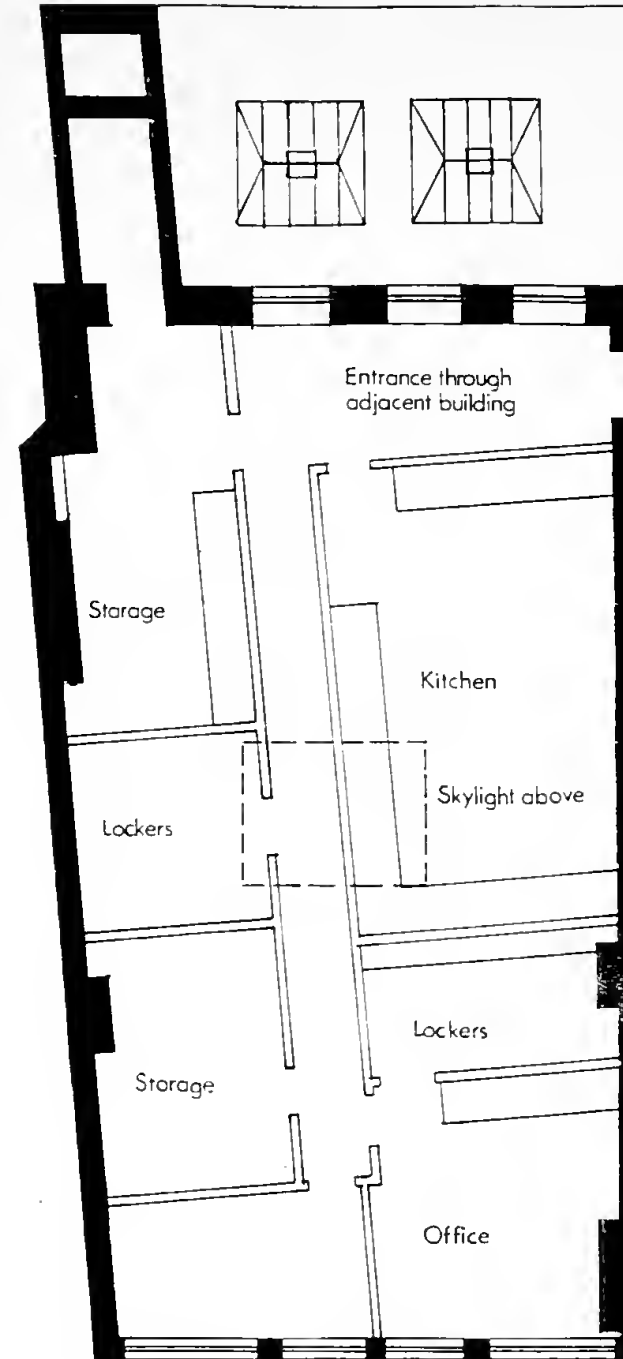
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SECOND LEVEL



THIRD LEVEL

11,13 ESSEX STREET

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

FLOOR PLANS: 1972

SCALE 0 4 8 16



December 1972

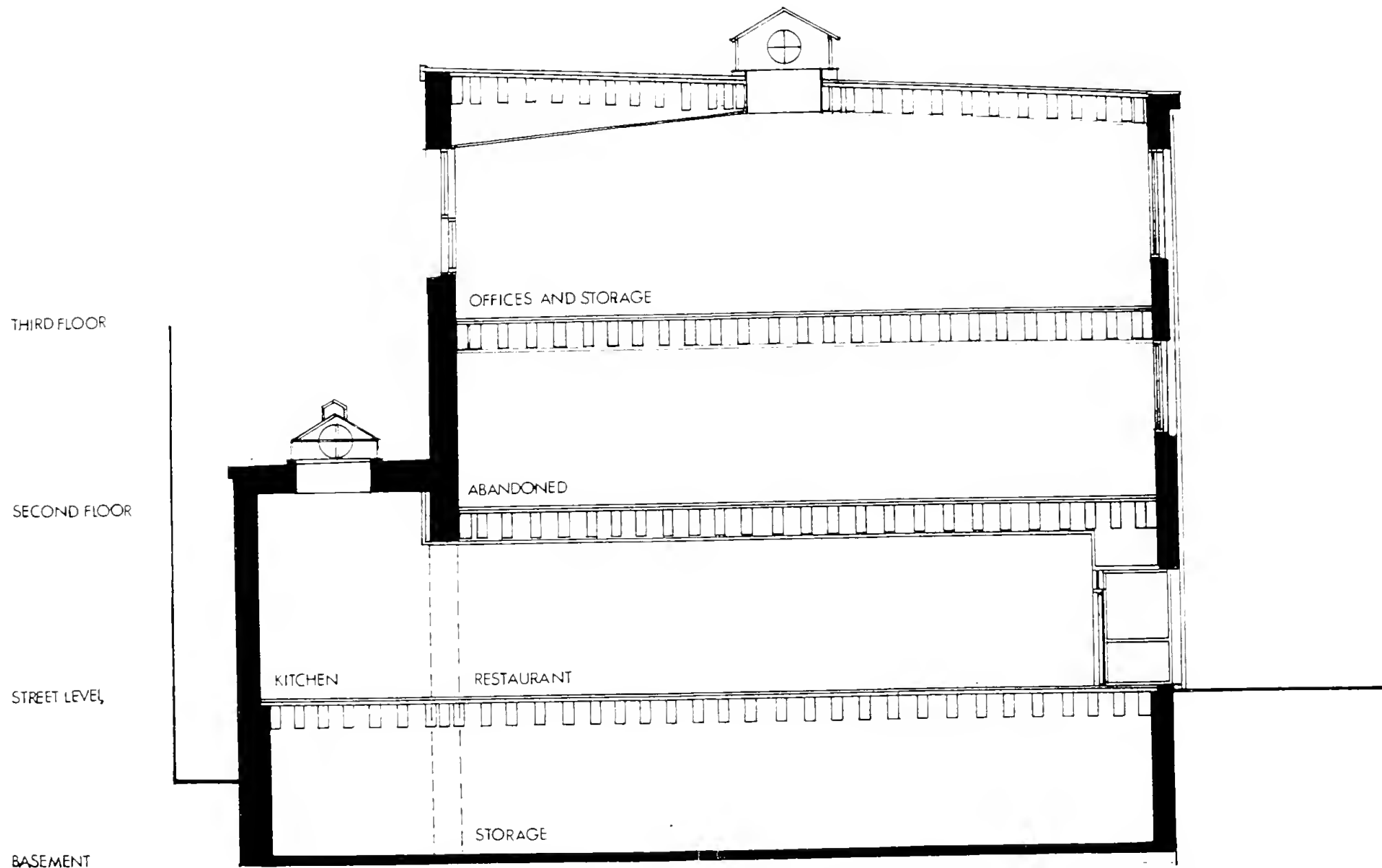
Prepared by:

Ralph Jackson  
Robert Luchetti  
James R. Owen

for Visual and Environmental  
Studies 163, Professor Sekler  
Harvard University

6 OF 7





**11,13 ESSEX STREET**  
 BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Prepared by:

Ralph Jackson  
 Robert Luchetti  
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 Studies 163, Professor Sekler  
 Harvard University

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## **APPENDIX: 15-17 ESSEX STREET**

**Ralph Jackson & Bob Luchetti**

Student papers, Lobb Library

Graduate School of Design, Harvard University

Cambridge, MA., 1972





ADDRESS 15-17 Essex St. COR.

NAME

presentoriginalMAP No. 24N/12ESUB AREA TheatreDATE 1875Building permit 6/30/1875

source

ARCHITECT attributed to Cummings and Sears  
on the basis of style<sup>1</sup> (no archite  
source listed on permiBUILDER William M. Rumery & Co (permit)

source

Frank H. Shapiro, TrusOWNER Atherton T. Brown / 15 Essex St.originalpresentPHOTOGRAPHS 11a 4/3, 7 1/3 '79Ward 3, Parcel # 4968 UTM# 19/330080/469071TYPE residential single double row 2-fam. 3-deck ten apt.  
non-residential commercial on lower floorsNO. OF STORIES (1st to cornice) 4 plusROOF flat cupola dormersMATERIALS (Frame) clapboards shingles stucco asphalt asbestos alum/vinyl  
(Other) brick stone freestone concrete iron/steel/alum.BRIEF DESCRIPTION Well-detailed polychrome High Victorian Gothic mercanti  
building largely intact except at storefront level; single second floor  
bay with decorative cast iron mullions, level 3 and 4 are four bays wid  
and feature polychrome carved stone banding, window chamfering, and  
Gothic motifs such as the Tudor arch, trefoil, quatrefoil and buttress.EXTERIOR ALTERATION minor moderate drastic storefront heavily altered. 2  
windows added at level 2CONDITION good fair poor LOT AREA 1496 sq. feetNOTEWORTHY SITE CHARACTERISTICS Part of architecturally notable emsemble  
including #11-31 Essex and the Liberty Tree BlockSIGNIFICANCE (cont'd on reverse) This building  
and the nearby Y.M.C.U., also dating from  
1875, are the theatre area's finest exampl  
of polychrome High Victorian Gothic,  
significant in their intact quality, fine  
detailing, subtle use of texture and  
material, and relative rarity as an  
architectural style.Both buildings were erected in the 2<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>  
year building boom which followed the Grea

(Map)

Moved; date if known \_\_\_\_\_

Themes (check as many as applicable)

Aboriginal	_____	Conservation	_____	Recreation	_____
Agricultural	_____	Education	_____	Religion	_____
Architectural	X	Exploration/	_____	Science/	_____
The Arts	_____	settlement	_____	invention	_____
Commerce	_____	Industry	_____	Social/	_____
Communication	_____	Military	_____	humanitarian	_____
Community/	_____	Political	_____	Transportation	_____
development	_____				

Significance (include explanation of themes checked above)

Fire of 1872. The first two floors at 15-17 Essex were intended for commercial use and the upper two for dwelling space for two families. Begun in 1880 the building housed Stern & Co, sewing machine dealers who served Boston agents for Remington and other models and also sold shuttles, oil and related sewing articles. The company stayed at this location until the 1910's, after which the building housed a restaurant and, from 1910 to the present, the Essex Liquor Store.

The building permit does not list an architect. The building has been attributed to Cummings and Sears on the basis of style, particularly the similarity of detailing to the 1868 Sears Building (since demolished) including the flatness of the facade and use of inset stone carvings between window arches and cornices and above pilasters.<sup>1</sup> Charles Amos Cummings (1833-1906) and Willard T. Sears (1837-1920) were very active during the period just after the Great Fire and designed buildings of similar distinction including the Hotel Boylston and Mason & Hamlin building in Tremont, both in the theatre area and both since destroyed, as well as the New Old South Church in the Back Bay. The association of this building with Cummings and Sears has yet to be documented, however.

Preservation Consideration (accessibility, re-use possibilities, capacity for public use and enjoyment, protection, utilities, context) \_\_\_\_\_

National Register: Part of suggested "Liberty Tree" district.

Bibliography and/or references (such as local histories, deeds, assessor's records, early maps, etc.)

1. Student paper for Prof. Sekler, on file at Carpenter Center, Harvard University.

The subject of our presentation is Number 17 Essex Street, built in 1875 in the downtown section of Boston sometimes called Chelsea. One of the few remaining examples here of the eclectic Ruskin Gothic style, the building was designed for use as a store and offices, with dwelling space for two families on the third and fourth floors. It was one of 444 commercial buildings erected during the 2½ years following Boston's Great Fire of 1872.<sup>1</sup> That fire took one week to conquer, causing the loss of eleven lives and damage to 65 acres of prime downtown property valued at 75 million dollars.<sup>2</sup> Responding to recommendations of the Boston Fire Department, the shaken city finally put into effect in 1895 a drastically revised and expanded building code designed to prevent future conflagrations of such magnitude.<sup>3</sup> The provisions of this new code reflected a significantly different approach to construction, which is already evident in the building we studied, in the substitution of brick load-bearing members for the previously fashionable cast-iron columns. (Granite and cast-iron, thought to be virtually indestructible prior to the Great Fire, were now seen to be greatly weakened by exposure to high temperatures and by outward pressure from exploding gas mains. The new building code therefore required that these materials were to be used only when they satisfied

standards of structural soundness established by the legal authorities and the building trades, rather than when they simply proved to be of ornamental value.)

Other outstanding provisions of the code defined first, second, and third class buildings, and strictly limited their dimensions, use, and permissible alterations or repairs according to each class; still others made the building inspector's approval of building plans contingent upon the existence of sufficient means of ingress and egress for each building and each floor; finally, methods of fire-proofing older existing buildings and appropriate fire- and water-resistant materials for use in new buildings were suggested.

After a period during which it seemed as if architects had been concerned almost exclusively with "effect" in their work, these provisions encouraged a very necessary return to the more practical technical side of the designing process. Our building on Essex Street illustrates, as we shall attempt to point out, just how well both aspects can complement each other when a skillful architect is responsible for a building.

After the turn of the century, number 17 Essex Street became increasingly converted to purely commercial uses, as was typical of many such buildings. The earliest known photograph of the building (c. 1890), reproduced below, shows that the top floor continued to be used as a dwelling, but that the third floor had apparently been turned into storage space. (The building is not open to inspection, nor are original documents available pertaining to it which would provide more specific information concerning the building's tenants.<sup>4</sup> We do know that it was occupied by the Stern Sewing Machine Depot, second floor tenants around 1890 as the photograph indicates; by an unnamed restaurant from 1915 to 1928; and by the Essex Liquor Store from 1933 to the present. The latter establishment apparently uses the entire building for retail sales space and for storage.





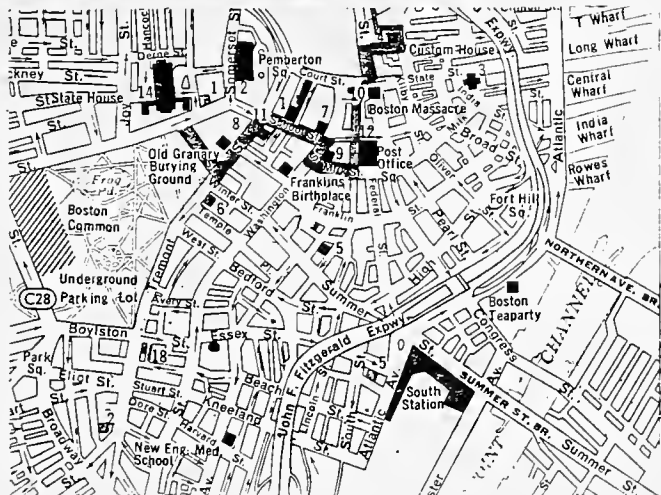
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17 essex street









The location of this building at the west end of Essex Street near its junction with Washington Street not only places it within the heart of the business district- a most favorable site for the firms which have occupied it since its construction- but also, ironically, recalls the early infamy of the street itself, echoed today by the general deterioration of the area. George Weston, Jr. wrote of Essex Street in the Boston Traveler Features, September 14, 1956:

...A raucous corner in 1686, an uproarious spot today, this locality was none too quiet in the vivid decade preceding the Revolution. Here, at the corner of what was Archmunty's Lane (sic) and Orange Street, (Essex and Washington), was the majestic elm known as the Liberty Tree, the gathering place of a patriotic mob called the Sons of Liberty...<sup>5</sup>

The 17th Century found Essex Street residents holding their ears as travelers through Boston held nightly revels in the street; during the Civil War, Wendell Phillips and Reverend Nehemiah Adams argued the slavery question from their respective home and pulpit on Essex Street; and it seems fitting that today taverns and a liquor store occupy the street where, in 1794, 30 distilleries were active.<sup>6</sup>

The building itself shows some signs of wear from continuous use, but it evidently has undergone no radical alterations. Comparison of our 1890 photograph with the 1968 one, reproduced below, shows that the facade has been altered by the addition of two windows in the third floor. (No record exists of this alteration.) From the pattern of the stonework and the carvings on the facade in the early photograph, however, we assume that this is the original design of the building in every other respect.

#### Technical Information Pertaining to 17 Essex Street <sup>7</sup>

original owner: Atherton T. (or F.) Brown

builder: William M. Rummary & Company

architect: unspecified

lot size (feet): front - 21  $\frac{8}{8}$ ; rear - 21  $\frac{8}{8}$ ; deep - 67

building dimensions (feet)

plan: 21  $\frac{8}{8}$  x 21 x 67

height from sidewalk to highest point of roof:	45
" " " " " " " wall:	47 $\frac{6}{6}$
" " " " " " " eaves:	43

number of floors: 4 (not including basement) - no ell

foundation: block stone laid on earth

building materials: cemented brick with sandstone front

roof: composition (tar and gravel)

cornice: stone, trimmed scuttles

cellar: concrete

headers + trimmers: 8 x 3, bolted, tenoned

floor timbers: 6 x 13, 3 x 13

miscellaneous: walls: tied to floors and carried through

roof; chimneys: plastered; heat: steam and stoves; fire

escapes: from roof to roof.

	<u>1st flr</u>	<u>2nd flr</u>	<u>3rd flr</u>	<u>4th flr</u>
thickness of external walls:	20"	20"	16"	16"
" " party walls:	16"	16"	16"	16"

17 Essex Street is a typical commercial building of the period, with its single narrow facade facing on the street. It is joined to the adjacent buildings by party walls, which add to one's impression of its verticality. The placement of the building right at the lot line, with its box-like form rising to its full height at that same line, was dictated (again, typically) by economics: total use of a site is encouraged by the high cost of city land.

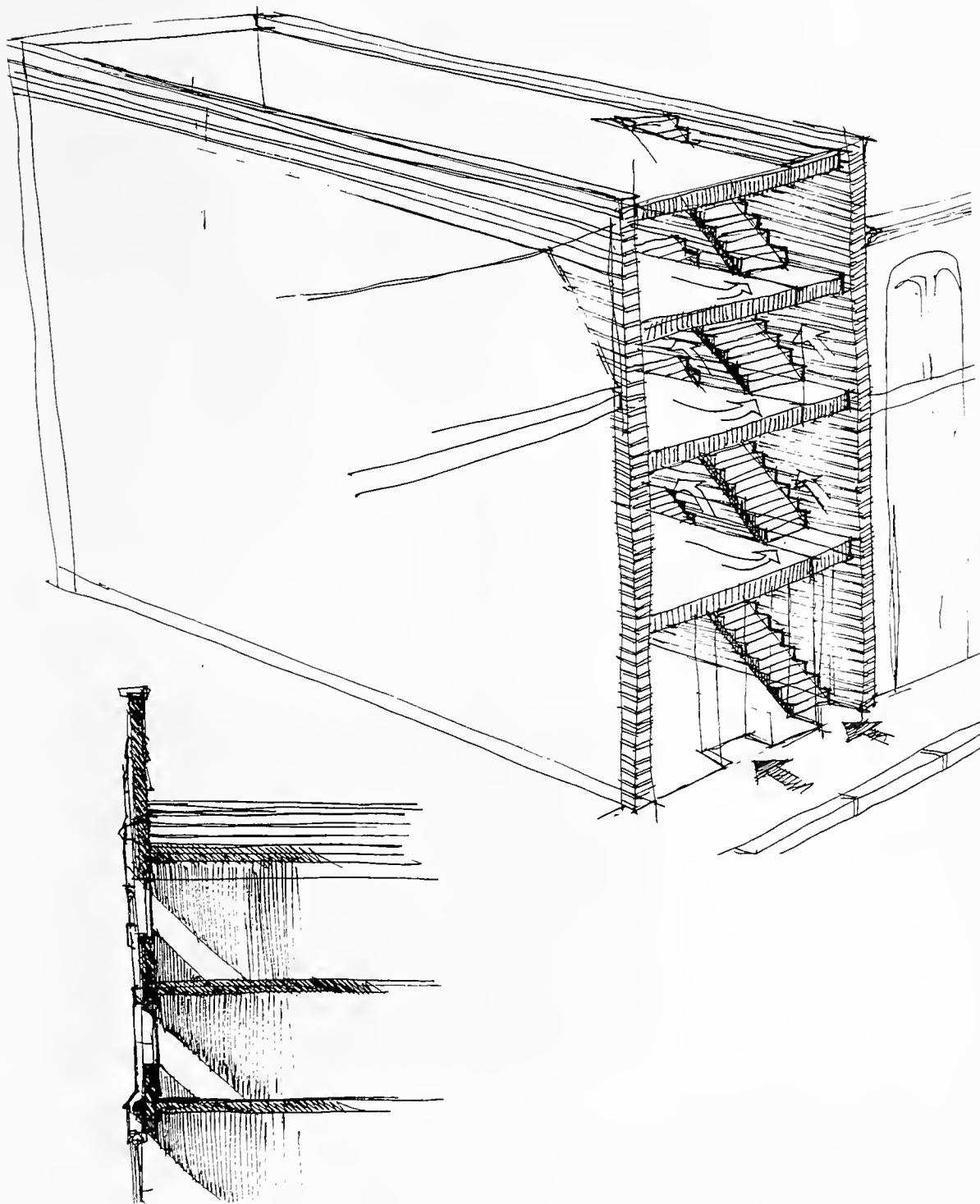
The organization of the building is extremely straightforward and simple. It is a brick bearing-wall "box", opened to the front and the rear and entered from the right of the facade by a set of stairs in standard urban fashion. The flat roof cannot be seen from street level. From our photographs it can be seen that the architect was intent upon opening up the facade to admit light to the commercial floors of the building: from the top to the bottom floor, the window areas increase to compensate for the smaller amount of light reaching each floor from outside. The opening up of the first and second floors is also expressive of the functions of those floors: whereas the dwelling areas above have windows which are scaled to human size and reflect the interiorly-oriented activities in those rooms, the lower business floors present a more outward-looking appearance in keeping with the public aims and activities of the firms within.

The front facade, because of its importance as the most public aspect of the building, is treated in ashlar stone. It is given particular emphasis by the individual carvings, each of a different design - additional evidence of the care and craftsmanship involved in the planning of the building..

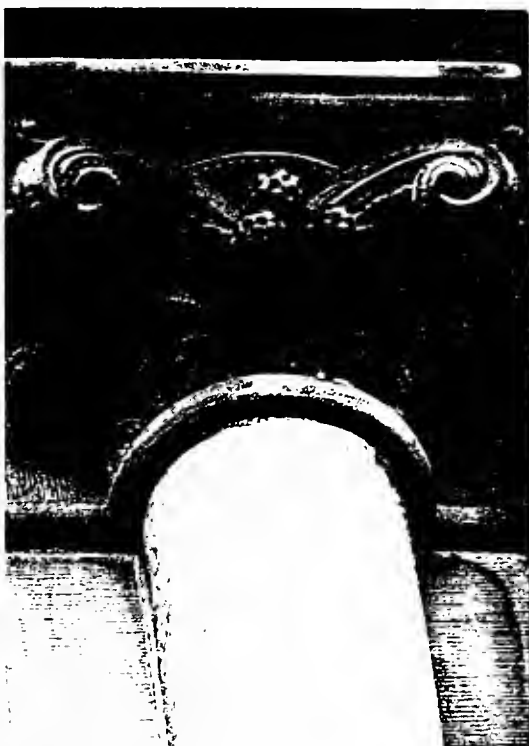
In other details as well, the building is a fine example of the architecture of the day. From minimal visual inspection of the first floor and of a basement stairway we were able to determine that the use of marble in stair treads and doorsills was quite lavish for such a small commercial building. The first floor has the classical embossed tin ceiling of the period and we have reason to believe that the upper floors may have similar ceilings.

The original records at the City Hall do not include any reference to the architect of this building. The highly distinctive handling of elements on the facade, however, have enabled us to formulate a working hypothesis as to the building's origins, which we will present here.

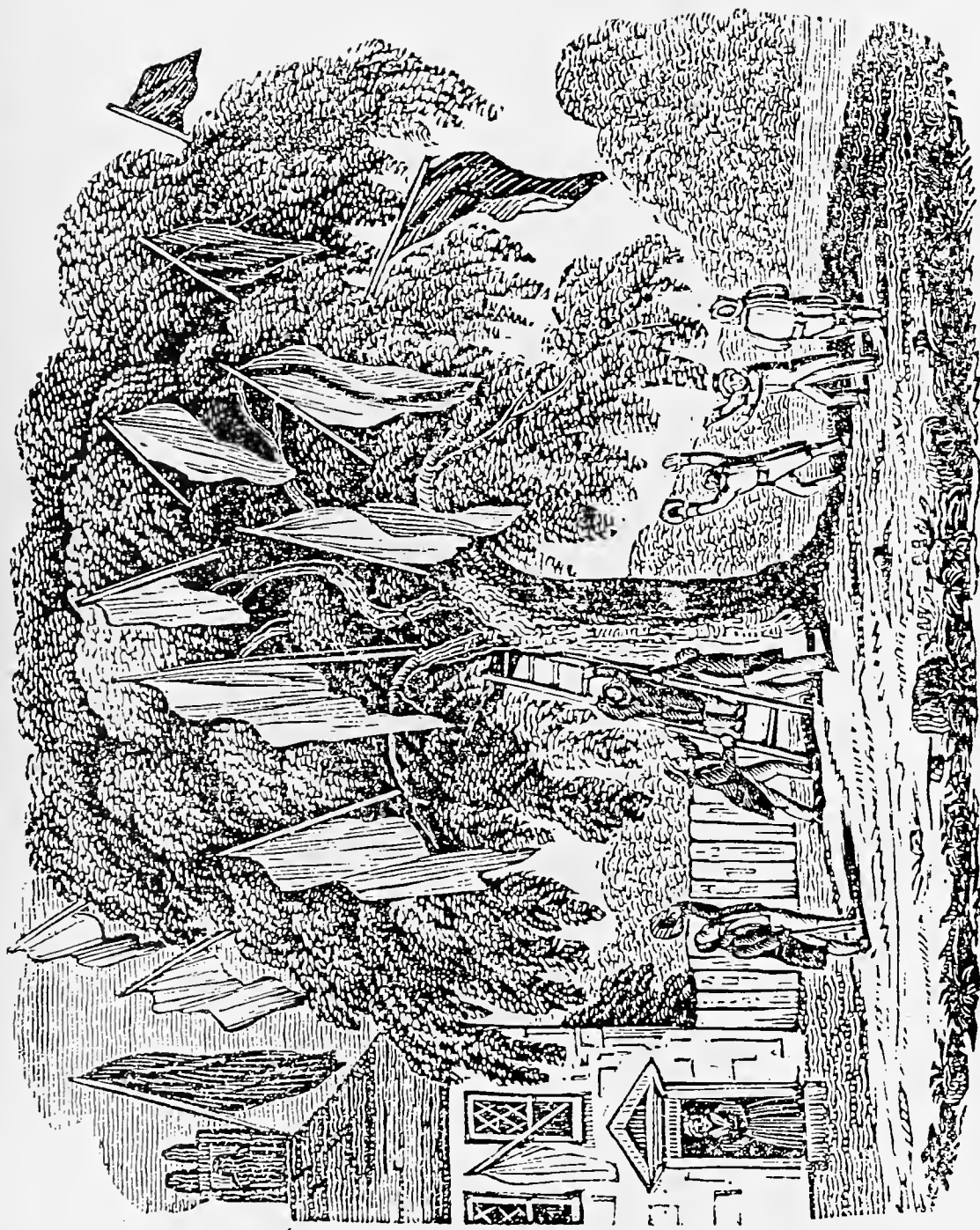






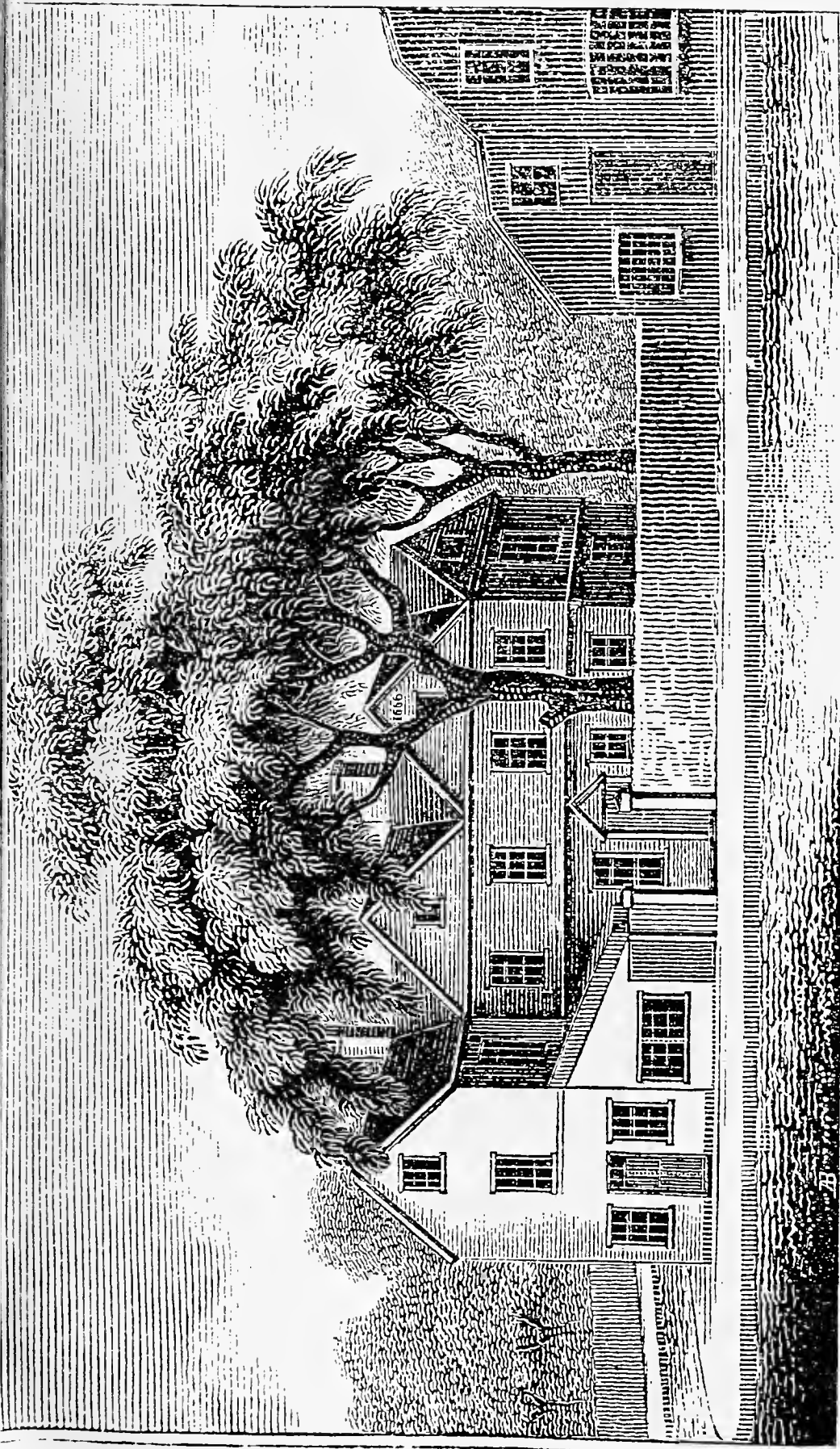






Liberty Tree hung with Banners.





LIBERTY TREE, 1774,

CORNER OF ESSEX AND ORANGE STREETS.

The world should never forget the spot where our stout Liberty Tree stood, famous in your annals. — *La Fayette*

1837  
SE 1135  
F 1687

1837. No. 1687  
Liberty Tree, from Snow's  
History of Boston





## ACCOPRESS®

25070	YELLOW
25071	BLACK
25072	LIGHT BLUE
25073	DARK BLUE
25074	LIGHT GRAY
25075	LIGHT GREEN
25076	DARK GREEN
25077	TANGERINE
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